

## Playing Games

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Summary: Collections of a few consecutive one shots. So more of a story I suppose? Set a few weeks after the 3rd season. Do Rikki and Zane still have feelings for each other? Can Zane win Rikki over? When their thrown into an awkward moment, alone, how will they react?

### 1. One Shot

Rikki glanced at her closet repetitively, thinking back on the days where pastels and neons once littered her wardrobe. Maybe it was a change in attitude - maybe it was just her life beckoning her to become the girl she used to be.

She pondered the options of her clothes' past. There were no bright colors anymore.

She didn't want to face it, but she knew in her heart what had caused her heart to drop and her taste to differ. Inevitably, the thoughts crept back into her mind again. She gripped the warm white handle of her hot chocolate mug and tried to tune them out. It was a pointless game.

Ever since her breakup with Zane, she noticed how everything she took in was perceived negatively. Bella described her constantly as an 'antagonist' - though she'd had her face buried in a pile of books recently. Rikki was in no mood to accept her opinion.

She found the steaming cup soothed her, and she was able to unwind at the foot of her bed, with her legs tucked to her chest.

Yet, she lost herself in another pointless, agonizing daydream.

She was walking along the beach, trailing her feet in the water. The cold rush of the ocean rang in her ears, and with every footstep she maneuvered further and further from the pressures of civilization.

She trailed her way to some rounded rocks, resting serenely where the tide surrendered. She hopped up and let the breeze carry her hair out of her face.

"Rikki," a dreamy voice echoed. She knew it all too well.

A loud ringing startled her out of her trance, and she fumbled to keep the hot coco with mug in her grasp. "Ah!" She groaned and rolled her eyes.

Wasn't it a good thing her mind was off Zane?

"Hello, uh," she cleared her throat. "Hello?"

"Hey baby." Rikki's heart sunk.

"Hey Dad," she laced up a pair of sandy converse, and pulled a sweatshirt over her head.

"I, uh, I'm at the store. You need anything. Like, uh. . ." he struggled to get the words out.

"Ah! No, Dad," she cut him off. Not a chance in hell she'd let him finish that sentence.

"Well anyways, I'm going to be working late at the garage-"

"No problem," Rikki shrugged, then questioned the action. She finished the conversation as politely as she could manage before snapping the phone shut.

She didn't expect her dad to be home for dinner anymore - he worked the evening shift at the garage. First decent job he'd had in a while, and Rikki didn't plan on interrupting that. She wasn't one for 'family time' anyways. Besides, she had yet to find a place of her own. She'd attended a few basic college courses and she was in no hurry to finish her tuition.

She locked the door behind her and strode over to the cafÃ©, calling Cleo in the midst of her footsteps. It was near sunset when she arrived.

She lingered at the beaded entrance hesitantly, drawing in a breath. She hadn't faced Zane for a good three weeks, and wasn't sure how he'd react.

She didn't want to admit the relief she felt that Sophie had taken a job out of the city; in fact, she was unsure of her actions. Did she even \_like\_ Zane anymore?

"Rikki!" Cleo called from behind her.

"Hey," she smiled. "Want me to order us something to drink?"

"Uh, actually," Cleo blushed. "I promised Lewis we'd get together tonight. I'm sorry. He's been planning something-"

"Not a problem," Rikki lied. She would just walk in there and face Zane alone. By herself. Flying solo.

Cleo sighed, recognizing the fear emitted from Rikki.

"\_Go\_, have fun," Rikki patted her back and shooed her off with a smile that barely passed as sarcastic.

She parted the beads and took a step, unaware what she'd walked into. She slammed her knee into the side of a table and spilled the remains of a deserted customer's drink.

"Damn!" She yelled. She saw a few wondering eyes peering at her from miscellaneous locations. One set in particular - Zane snorted at her from behind the counter, rounding it while trying to hide his smirk.

She rolled her eyes and turned on her squeaking heels. It wasn't like she was avoiding Zane anymore - that ship had sailed. She wasn't even sure what charade her card read nowadays.

"Wait," he chuckled, lightly moving her shoulder so she faced him. That playful grin lit up his face, and his eyes beamed. She assumed it was just the artificial lights.

"Nevermind," Rikki said as politely as she could manage. She reached for the doorway.

Zane was down to earth as he spoke, though Rikki could detect a little longing in his voice. "At least let me assist you with a band-aid," his voice hinted at sarcasm.

She looked down and groaned quietly, appalled at how her knee would betray her. Her knee had tore open and there was a little bruise forming under the cut.

Zane was still smiling, but it was more in a sincere sweet way. She hoped it wasn't some sort of trick - some sort of mind game he was playing with her.

"Come here," he walked slowly to his brightly lit office. She hesitated then followed.

He motioned for her to sit in the leather chair, as she did.

She watched his fluent motions; removing the old box of band aids from the cabinet and peeling off the wrapper. The little scraps fluttered to the trash bin.

It was a little shocking when he knelt down on one knee in order place the band-aid on her injury. He treated it like it was severe.

Rikki was short of breath. That creative, exponentially increasing adrenaline rushing, wild fantasy side of her mind started up. She could hear the gears cranking and rumbling to life. Her heart started beating faster - that was, when it was beating at all. A warm sweat broke out of her forehead and she tried to hide it. It appeared in her line of vision, that Zane was kneeling before her. On one knee.

She shook off the feeling she'd spent months worrying about losing, then trying to contain. It was here, and the fact was this truth; it

was definitely here to stay.

"Rikki?" Zane asked.

Her head jerked towards him. "Oh, sorry," she blushed.

He stood up and offered his hand to her.

She rolled her eyes. "Honestly, it's not broken," she sneered.

She got up, avoiding any physical contactâ€|she wondered if it was just to annoy him, or if this was her playing hard to get.

"Hey, wait," he stuttered, his smile dimming. "You obviously came here for a reason. . ." he suggested regrettably.

Her voice was a monotone. "I was meeting Cleo."

"Where is she?"

"With Lewis and I don't need you questioning my motives," she turned the handle of the door, agitated.

He rushed over and placed his hand on hers. It sent a jolt of pulsing electricity up her spine. It made the hairs on the back of her clammy neck stand up and each of her harsh thoughts melted to mush.

"Stay for a drink? It's on the house?"

The moment their eyes met, she knew she was in for it. He sensed her let her guard down and took advantage of the moment. Zane wrapped his hand around Rikki's and led her to the bar, where she sat in the cushioned bar stool opposite the blender.

"What can I get for you?" he smiled accompanied by a nervous laugh.

Rikki pondered the menu aimlessly; she already knew what she wanted. What she really needed was time to think. She could leave, but there was always that chance - honestly, she just wanted Zane and herself to be friends. Good friends. She was utterly jealous at how Cleo and Lewis could be so comfortable around each other; it was obvious the two birds were in love.

Love?

Her train of thoughts took an unexpected twist in a direction she didn't feel like traveling. All the mush about love and relationships crept in to her consciousness. Regrettably, she glanced up. She couldn't help the involuntary action.

Zane was staring into her eyes, with a sincere look of content on his face. Maybe he was still smiling from before. Yet, it seemed like he was smiling at her.

Her eyes quickly darted back to her name plastered on the menu. She took in a breath and blew a strand of hair out of her face, trying to act nonchalant, and wondering if he really knew her well enough to see through the act. To her dismay, the hair settled on top of her eye again.

Zane's arms were crossed atop the table, as he was leaning in her direction. He shifted his weight to the right one, and ever so slightly reached up with his left. With a look of longing ringing in his features, he tucked the blonde wave behind her ear, attempting to touch her face; something he didn't want to admit that he missed.

Startled, she glanced up from the menu yet again and resisted the urge to lean into his hand. Instead she slammed the menu into his face and ask for a Banana Smoothie with mint, please.

It wasn't very noticeable, yet Zane's hand shook as he pulled it back. If he really looked deep inside himself, he knew no matter how large he portrayed his ego, he would face rejection hard. And, he didn't know how much more of it he could take.

While the roar of the blender drowned out any sounds, the noise projecting from their physical stances said enough. Was it true that anticipation can sometimes be greater than the actual event itself? He denied that claim, knowing every second spent with Rikki was better valued than a second spent thinking about her.

"Here's your smoothie, Rikki," he stuttered on her name and tried to cover it with a smile.

She loved hearing him say her name. "Thanks," she sipped a little out of the bendy straw.

Hesitation lingered in his eyes before he maneuvered flawlessly around the corner, sitting in the chair to the left of her.

Rikki glanced up, and couldn't make herself look down.

"So, how areâ€|things?" Zane was noticeably nervous, pertaining to the way he sat - guarded. He had a uncontainable smile plastered on his lips.

"They're ok, I guess," she shrugged.

"So, no mermaid mishapsâ€|?" his tone was light.

"Not at the moment," Rikki finished her drink during the long pauses in their short conversation.

Zane racked his brain for new material. "Been out to Mako recently?" he suggested.

She sighed. "I was heading out there tonight. . ." she looked into his desperate eyes.

Now it was Zane who was flustered. Had Rikki just suggested they go together? Or was she teasing him? He wished against the latter, yet that's what prominently haunted him. He had to think fast; he had to say something smooth-

"Excuse me," a rotund customer coughed. His floral patterned vacationer's button up barely covered his gut.

Rikki scrunched her face and looked away. "Well, thanks forâ€|this,"

she stood up and turned.

The man coughed again.

"Can I help you?" Zane asked sarcastically.

"Yeah, I'll have whatever that girl was having," he licked his lips.

Zane stood up. "Look, we're closed for the night," he lied. It was only seven - the café closed at ten.

The man was bewildered and turned, disappearing out the back just as Rikki had. Zane buried his face in his hands. He had made the wrong decision \_again\_ - choosing the business over Rikki.

He jumped as a gentle hand rested on his shoulder. The adrenaline pumping in his heart overruled his common sense. "Rikki? What are you-"

"Can't you take a hint?" she smiled slightly.

"A hint at what?" He was slightly disoriented by the lights.

Rikki had a thousand sensations and wants, most relating to the sappy drama she wished to take no part in. Like hugs and kisses and hand-holding. "Do you want to do somethingâ€¦ maybe, tonight. As friends," she slurred her last words.

He rubbed his eyes and smiled as wide as the sun, and hoisted himself down from the bar stool.

She blinked, first, waiting for an answer.

"Just, um, um, let me lock up," he tried not to resemble a clown on drugs but once inside his office, he let himself smile.

As they parted the beaded doorway, Zane locked the café behind them.

"Where to?" he asked.

She pondered answering with \_anywhere.\_

Rikki ended up leading Zane to the beach. After a minute of silence - all but the scraping of Rikki's old converse - Zane pursed his lips and reached for Rikki's hand.

She looked down and let out a high pitched sound of annoyance. They stopped walking and Rikki turned to him, pulling her hand away harsher than intended. "Zane! I'm sorry, I can't do this anymore! I'm tired of playing these stupid games with you."

"Friendsâ€¦ can't hold hands?"

She rolled her eyes. "It means something entirely different and you know it."

"Why do you think that?"

"Becauseâ€¦I know you."

There was an eerie silence - all but the rushing of the waves, and the cool breeze sending goosebumps up Rikki's spine.

Zane removed his sweet smelling sweatshirt and placed it around Rikki's shoulders, even as it made him cold.

"Zane," she snapped aggravated.

He just smiled. "What does this even mean?"

"What's '\_this\_'?"

"â€¦Us."

"What about you and me?"

"Wellâ€¦what would you say to \_us\_?" Zane swallowed, knowing this would be his last attempt to re-gain Rikki's heart. He knew after this, all thoughts, all actions would become muted and dull. Nothing would matter because it truly would be too late to spark again the flame they once shared.

Rikki slipped the sweatshirt sleeves on. She did something she'd been meaning to do for two years. She leaned in and wrapped her arms around his neck and smiled. "I don't know anything anymore Zane."

"What do you know?"

She shrugged.

"Well. . .do you like me?"

"What?"

He waited, smirking.

Their eyes were so close. She glanced at his lips and before she could reject, Zane kissed her.

"Zane!" she shouted in faux aggravation. Though, he knew her well enough to detect the glimmer in her eyes.

## 2. The Aftermath

Last night had passed in a blur, and Rikki had no idea what had happened. Whether she even cared for Zane anymore was beyond her understanding. She would have assumed he'd moved on - but apparently, she hadn't either. Over the years they'd had their share of bad timesâ€¦but for every bad time, there had to be two good ones. That, she supposed, was what held them together.

Her phone buzzed early in the morning and she answered quite agitated. "What?" she asked, not bothering to check the caller ID.

"Uh hey, Rikki?"

She sat up, and threw on some shorts. "Who's this again?" she asked, a little confused. The voice was muted and she wasn't fully awake.

"It's Zane."

Rikki managed to say "Oh," before stopping herself. She didn't know whether to smile or grimace.

There was a pause. "I was just curious—well, you still have my jacket," he chickened out, a little surprised that she'd answered.

"No I don't?" she was confused, but smiling. "Zane—would you want to do something today? I need to talk to you. About things," she offered, sparing him of his misery. She had a hidden sympathetic side.

On the other end, she swore she heard a sigh of relief. "Yeah. That'd be great. Can I meet you somewhere?"

"Meet me—by your boat?" she suggested.

He was a little skeptical of whether spending a day out on the open ocean, just the two of them, was going to go so well, but he agreed.

Rikki snapped the phone shut and tried to stop smiling, though she couldn't. Of all the times she'd thought of Zane, most had to be negative interpretations. Yet, the positive tended to out rule the negative in circumstances where love was involved. Rikki didn't love Zane. But she surely felt for him as she knew he did for her.

As of lately, Rikki had grown impatient at the games they constantly played with each other. Mind games; does she like me? Did he just look at me? What does it all mean!

Usually, she hosted the capability to tune it out. But somewhere along the rocky road, she had a change in mind.

Rikki threw on a button-down white shirt and some knee length jean shorts. Dressed up but casual, indeed. She laughed aloud. Cleo and Bella were always taking her shopping and giving her clothing advice - to Rikki, it didn't matter.

She walked alongside her trailer home, trailing her finger across the rusted paneling absent mindedly. It didn't take long for her to wonder to Zane's boat.

Before she reached the end of the pier, where the red raft nestled into the waves, she had to ever-so-politely ask Nate to move. He stood in the middle of the thinnest second of the walkway, looking at a text that he grinned at.

"Excuse me," Rikki gently nudged his shoulder.

"Rikk-ay!" Nate tried to act like a tiger, but ended up appearing like a mangled street cat. He rolled his R's attempting to be



flirtatious. Nate's large ego surely suggested that \_was\_ in a way, how people actually acted in society. Maybe his ego shielded his eyes, blinding him. Then again, he seemed to be seeing Rikki just fine.

"Move," she nudged his shoulder a little harder, aggravated at the situation.

"We've got a feisty one," he laughed obnoxiously, dragging out his dull charade. Nate tucked his phone away and pinned Rikki up against the side of a white boat. It wasn't a playful pin; her arms were in a position of surrender and Nate didn't plan to let her escape. At least, not without getting what he wanted.

Rikki struggled to get out but it was no use. She thrashed and kicked but he had her held down.

"Nate! Get off of me you ignorant \_pig\_!" she screamed at him, feeling a hurt in her throat where the sound escaped.

"Calm down," he hushed her like she was a toddler.

He leaned in. Before Nate's garlic scented lips could stretch any closer to Rikki's, he was thrown off her by an opposing force.

"What the \_hell\_!" Zane asked appearing out of the blue and slamming Nate into the boat side opposite Rikki.

Nate stumbled upright and rubbed the back of his head like they were just playfully wrestling. "Ouch mate, you need to chill," he gave Rikki a look of \_Hey, what's up with this guy?\_

Zane - without and romance or intention of it - took Rikki's hand in a caring gesture and led her to the end of the pier.

Nate followed, and the pair were unable to shake him off.

"Sorry man, didn't know she was your chic," he jabbed his thumb at Rikki.

"She's not my '\_chic\_', Nate! What were you going to do to her you sick-"

"Calm down, I only wanted a kiss!"

"She didn't \_want\_ to kiss \_you\_."

"She's aboard the Nate-train, if you know what I mean," he laughed.

Zane sighed and motioned for Rikki to get onto the boat.

"Where you headed?" Nate asked, attempting to step on.

"Somewhere without you," Rikki shooed him back.

"Ey," he smiled at Rikki. "When he disappoints, I'll be waiting," he half bobbed down the pier leaving Rikki alone with Zane.

"Why are you friends with him?" Rikki was rethinking the day.

"I'm not," Zane smirked at her, but the smile quickly faded as he sat next to her on the little built in bench. "Are you ok?" He asked, serious.

"I'm fine," she dismissed the topic, but Zane wouldn't let it go.

"Seriously. Maybe it's not such a great idea to be out on the open sea if you're-"

"I'm fine," she assured, taking his hand.

Zane's cheeks darkened and they were soon a deep red, that Rikki noticed.

She tried to pull her hand away, not wanting to embarrass him, but he refused to let her, starting the boat and steering them out with his right hand.

"Where to?" he asked, like he didn't already know.

"Doesn't matter," she said without thinking. Her eyes widened and he laughed, quickly stopping himself but still smiling. The longing in her voice was too prominent for either of them, and her response was in a dreamy tone. They both knew how doesn't matter's double meaning hinted at Anywhere, as long as I'm with you.\_

"Mako then," he laughed and looked at Rikki, who was already staring at him.

She pulled her hands away and maneuvered her body into crossed arms and legs pointing away - classic closed off body language.

"Look. Zane. We need to talk. Ok?"

They pulled up to the beach on Mako. Zane turned to her, care apparent in his features. Gratefulness was all he felt. He'd only wanted to talk for so, so long.

There were a few feet of wet sand at the front of the boat - it wouldn't be dragged in any further without harming the propellers - but Rikki couldn't jump that far without getting her feet wet.

She grimaced.

Zane was on shore with his back to her, taking in the beauty of the ancient island. When he turned, his eyes had a distant glaze to them.

He looked at her, looking down and laughed outright.

"Nice. Not even going to bother to help me."

"Oh come on," he teased. "You didn't think this island had room for the\_ both\_ of us? Did you?"

Yeah she sarcastically twisted her facial muscles to say.

"Unfortunate," he teased, sitting right above the surf.

"Fine," she frowned. "We can talk here. I had some things I wanted to get straight."

Her tone wasn't pleasant, as Zane feared he'd made the wrong move.

"I'm sorry. I wanted to say that I really was, and am, and I didn't pay enough attention to you. And I do care," he dragged his toes through the sand at the waters edge.

"Please. Your never going to care. Not like usâ€|together. Not like when we first started dating. I guessâ€|you were always chasing me. And I guess I'm confused. I don't know. You got to know me and did things for me and cared," her voice squeaked. She sat down facing the sea. "I mean, you don't anymore."

He was glad she couldn't see how much that stung. "You're wrong. You're just so blind," he half smiled.

She whirled around. "I can take off in the sea whenever I want to, Zane!"

"You're wrongâ€|because I do care. And I haven't stopped chasing you." He held her gaze until her face softened.

"You cheated on me. And lied to me. You don't involve me in your life anymore. I guess that's what I'm trying to say. You don't deserve me," her words were harsh.

He hopped up onto the boat. He wrapped his arms around her back and put his chin on her head, pressing his lips to her and breathing in the scent of her hair. Maybe for the last time.

"Look I'm sorry Rikki. For everything. For being a shitty boyfriend and whatever else. But I've been doing a lot of thinkingâ€|"

"Zane, I'm leaving. Goodbye."

"Rikki, stop!" he caught her arm, and he just lost it. He'd be broken without her again. He'd be missing the rest of him puzzle, a floating desire in a broken sea of hurt. If Rikki leftâ€|

He couldn't take it. As man enough as he was, he knew what was happening. He'd ruined everything. And there was tear on his cheek. Glistening, haunting.

She struggled before turning to him. There were streams on her face as well.

Neither wanted to speak first. They'd never seen one another cry before, and this time, it was over each other. They just held each other's gaze.

"Please don't leave me," he begged in a whisper.

"I don't want to leave us behind, butâ€|" she shook.

"I'll be better. I'll be there for you. In fact, no more cafÃ©. I'll

sell it if I need to. I don't care anymore. Nothing can be more painful than the tearing I feel when you're away. Or talking to Will, or hanging with Nate and your friends and their families and all of my friends. And anyone. Anyone but me."

She thought for a minute before admitting what she'd been denying for so long. "It's only because I miss you the most."

He pulled her into his tight embrace and just let her be there like that for a long moment, until it felt right.

He took her hands in hers and pulled her in for a tight kiss, passionately running his hands through her flawless hair and pulling her so close against him his elbows crossed behind her.

Rikki didn't object. She moved her hands over his face and down his back, sending goosebumps up his spine.

He paused when his grin was too big to match her lips and scooped her up bridal style.

He carried her across the water as much as she objected and lay her down in the sand where he sat gentleman-like next to her, laughing.

Rikki was breathing hard and in the moment and so utterly thrilled that he still felt for her. She never knew she could feel this much. She bit her lip and grinned at him, and spur of the moment, crawled onto him working from his knees up to his stomach and pressed her lips against his again. He gave in for a moment, arching into her hips but then stopping, wanting to continue so bad but knowing they shouldn't.

He gently set her off him.

"So you'll go out with me then?" he asked, sitting up, a failure at changing the subject.

"Iâ€¦Iâ€¦sorry," she managed.

"Don't be. It's not that I don't wantâ€¦I meanâ€¦I do, it's justâ€¦"

"I get it," she nodded.

He took her hand in her face. "I've wanted this for so long, you don't understand."

"\_This\_, this? Oh so that's how you imagine me. The little slut." She was a tease, but wasn't letting on.

"No Rikki, please I'm sorry."

She smiled and bit her lip.

He narrowed his eyes. "Nice."

"I have my moments."

End  
file.